



Environmental News

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EPA, SEMARNAT Improving Border Environment Through Increased Stakeholder Involvement

New Pediatric Health Unit to Help Pediatricians and Parents

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EPA Administrator Christie Whitman and Secretary Victor Lichtinger of Mexico's Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT) today announced principles that will guide the U.S. and Mexico as the countries develop a new results-oriented border plan to address future environmental issues along the U.S.-Mexico border. The environmental leaders stressed an approach that will empower state and local governments as well as U.S. tribes to establish their own priorities in protecting the environment and public health in the border region. They also emphasized their commitment to have more effective participation by stakeholder groups as binational environmental plans are formulated. The two governments will look at regional work groups, furthering their commitments to more transparent decision-making and locally focused planning.

"I am pleased to be with Secretary Lichtinger to reaffirm our joint commitment to addressing the environmental challenges our countries face along our border," said Whitman. "As the border region grows, so too does the need for smart planning and close cooperation. Economic prosperity and environmental protection must go hand in hand here in the border region. I am pleased that we agree on the need for our agencies to work closely with our state partners to develop a new, results-oriented plan for border environmental activities."

"We agree on the importance of broadening our binational effort, giving state, local and U.S. tribal governments greater say and greater participation in setting the agenda for environmental progress," continued Whitman. "We also agree that our efforts to involve all the border region stakeholders -- communities, business, academia, non-governmental organizations, and state, local and U.S. tribal governments -- must be fully transparent. Both of these steps are in keeping with our shared belief in the importance, indeed the indispensability, of involving those closest to a challenge in its solution."

The idea of regionalized workgroups has been a concept encouraged by the ten states, made up of the governors of the four U.S. and six Mexico border states. More information on the U.S.-Mexico partnership is available at: <http://www.epa.gov/usmexicoborder/index.htm>.

A notable achievement of U.S. and Mexico collaboration on environmental issues is the Juarez wastewater treatment plant, where Whitman and Lichtinger met today. The need for the plant was identified and elevated by Border XXI, and it was constructed through the efforts of the Border Environmental Cooperation Commission and the North American Development Bank with U.S. and Mexican funds. Border XXI was the second binational border plan under the framework of the La Paz agreement.

Whitman also announced EPA will fund the inclusion of Mexico in the Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU) network. This network helps pediatricians and environmental health specialists share

information and answers questions on how to better serve children impacted by exposure to environmental hazards. EPA's \$155,000 grant will fund a PEHSU unit in Cuernavaca for the first year.

"It is our hope that this unit, part of the very successful pediatric environmental health speciality unit effort established three years ago will help bring the benefits of pediatric environmental health awareness to thousands of Mexican children," said Whitman.

There are 11 units in the U.S. funded by the EPA and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR, part of CDC/ HHS), providing services to health care providers, public health officials and the general public. Pediatric health units respond to questions from pediatricians and parents about environmentally related child health problems.

The Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics, a non-profit that works to improve the practice of occupational and environmental health through information sharing and research, manages all eleven units in the U.S. The AOEC will work with the *Institute Nacional de Salud Publica* and the *Hospital del Niño Morelense* to establish the clinic. There is one unit in Canada that is part of the network, but not funded by the EPA. More information on the PEHSU program is available on the Internet at www.aoec.org.

Mexico and the U.S. have shared numerous successes along the border including increased and improved water and wastewater treatment capabilities, significantly improved air quality monitoring, the development of emission inventories, strengthened local public health capabilities and improved environmental enforcement.